



# Washington State Department of Agriculture

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## **First West Nile virus horse case of the year confirmed in Kennewick**

**OLYMPIA** – The [Washington State Department of Agriculture](#) (WSDA) is reporting that a five-year-old Quarter horse gelding in Kennewick is the first equine in the state to contract West Nile virus this year. The horse, which was not vaccinated for the disease, has not left the owner's property recently. The horse's status is improving.

The Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Pullman, operated by Washington State University, reported the positive test results to WSDA's State Veterinarian's Office Friday.

Washington had five confirmed cases of horses with West Nile virus last year, including horses in Benton, Franklin, Grant, Okanogan and Yakima counties.

West Nile virus is spread by mosquitoes that have fed on infected birds. The disease sickens people, horses, birds and other animals, but it does not spread directly from horses to people or other animals.

The disease is fatal to horses in about a third of the cases in which clinical signs are apparent, although most horses do not become ill and show no symptoms. Horses that do become ill can appear to be displaying loss of coordination, loss of appetite, confusion, fever, stiffness, and muscle weakness, particularly in their hindquarters.

State Veterinarian Dr. Joe Baker recommends spring as the best time to vaccinate horses against West Nile virus or obtain an annual booster shot. However, horses may still benefit from first-time vaccinations or an annual booster shot. Horse owners not up to date on shots may benefit from a visit with their veterinarian to determine a vaccination protocol that best fits their situation.

Besides vaccination, horse owners can take action to limit horse exposure to mosquitoes. For example, reduce or eliminate sources of stagnant or standing water, stable horses during peak mosquito periods (dawn and dusk), use equine-approved mosquito repellants, place fans inside barns or stalls to maintain air movement, and avoid using incandescent bulbs inside stables at night.

Veterinarians who learn of potential West Nile virus cases in horses or other animals should contact the State Veterinarian's Office at (360) 902-1881.

Visit the websites of the state [Department of Agriculture](#), [Department of Health](#), or [the U.S. Departments of Agriculture](#) for more information. Last year, the USDA reported 134 equine cases involving West Nile virus.

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